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CHAPTER XXIX.

It is within an hour of sunset on a winter's day. An inch of snow covers the earth like a royal carpet, and dark and ragged clouds drive fast across a cold blue sky.

In front of Rest Haven, looking to the south, the hills recede and leave an almost level plain on which there is no greater obstruction than an occasional tree or bush. A creek which has its birthplace in the mountains meanders across this plain, but divides it about equally. The plain is large enough for 5,000 cavalry to maneuver on, and along its edges are a dozen spots on which field artillery can be posted advantageously.

Attention, now, for you are going to witness one of the grandest sights in war—a cavalry fight! Only a few of the Confederates have appeared in sight, but Custer has guessed the situation and is preparing for it. While he is issuing orders and the squadrons are moving and the artillery galloping into position, one of his aids is hurrying up the slope to abandon the house. Wrapped in her bedding instead of a shroud, the dead woman is borne to an ambulance by troopers with uncovered heads and reverent mien—troopers who will beshouten like devils and wearing the looks of madmen half an hour hence. Marian goes with her dead, Royal Kenton into an ambulance by himself. The vehicles take the road for the Federal lines.

"You are a noncombatant and had better go with him," the officer said to Steve Brayton as Kenton was ready to go.

"Sense me fur differin with yo'," replied Steve, "but if it won't do no pertick'lar harm I'll stay and see this fuss over with. It's gon to be a right smart scrimmage, I take it, and as it'll probably be the last fun I'll see I'll sorter hang around. That's that, ole nigger, though—don't leave him."

Uncle Ben stood in the midst of the bustle with bundles and packages in his arms and at his feet. He was told to get into the vehicle with Kenton, and next moment six horses were galloping a gun over the spot where he had stood.

Look to the south. The Confederates are debouching from the highway and deploying on the plain. Their banners are filled with rejoicing as they behold



The artillery galloping into position, the force of Federals opposed. They, too, have longed for a battle in which the infantry should have no part, and the oft expressed wish is about to be gratified.

There is no advantage of position. Two thousand Federals, 2,000 Confederates, and each has a battery numbering six pieces. Custer's guns could reach the gray horsemen as they deploy, but every piece is silent. A charge by half his command across that snow covered plain would have swept the field at first and crushed the Confederates back into the narrow highway to become a panic stricken mob. No charge was ordered. The man whose name was to become a household word before the end of the war and whose life was to be spared on 20 fields of battle that it might go out with the shouts of Indian demons ringing in his ears at his horse and watched and waited. He had come to the brigade of stalwart Michigansers a few months previously fresh from West Point. He had been called a boy, and men and officers had taken no pains to conceal their sarcasm and distrust. Two or three times he had led them in a dash there, but little fighting resulted. He would test them now, and they should weigh him in the balance. Boom! Boom! The Confederate battery is the first to open fire, and it is promptly responded to. The very first missile is a percussion shell, and it drives its way into the horse so lately occupied by the living and the dead, and in its explosion brings wreck and ruin. Twelve guns are belching their death missiles across the open space when a sudden cry rises to the lips of a thousand men. From the western edge of the plain, where the pines grow thick, a woman suddenly appears to view. She is bareheaded, and her hair is flying about her shoulders. She has neither shawl nor cloak, and her dress is ragged and torn. She has a stick in her hand, and she waves it as if it were a sword in the hand of a man and starts at a wild run for the eastern edge of the plain, right across the front of the lines drawn up in battle array. The cry of astonishment which greeted her appearance becomes a shout of warning, but she does not heed it. Enveloped by the smoke of her guns, the artilleryists do not see her. Their hearing deadened by the loud reports, they do not catch the shouts uttered by Federal and Confederate alike. Round shot and shell go whizzing and shrieking over the snow, and men waiting for battle shudder at the woman's danger.

"Who's that? Halt! Halt! He can never do it! He's sure to be killed!" So cried 500 Federals as Steve Brayton, mounted on the horse of a trooper he had been asked to hold for a moment, dashed straight out into the plain to lead the woman off. He knew her the moment she stepped out of the woods. Uncle Ben had told him of the meeting with Mrs. Baxter on the highway. He and flung her down the bank with tremendous force, and as he came back over the road with Custer's men he expected to find her lying there dead. Nothing was to be seen of her, however,

and his mind was greatly relieved. In her fall, as was afterward known, the woman's head struck a stone, and the skull was fractured. When she struggled up, she was no longer sane. She had been wandering through the forest for hours before she appeared on the battlefield, but she encountered no one and found no shelter. Never was there a more gallant deed than that performed by Steve Brayton, and never was hero more heartily applauded by friend and foe. He galloped his horse straight at the woman, and as he came up to her he leaped over the saddle, caught her with both hands, and next instant she was on the saddle before him, and the horse was flying back to the Federal lines. The woman fought and screamed, and fragments of burning shell whizzed and whirled around and above horses and riders, but they dashed into the lines unhurt, and the gallant rescuer was directed to continue down the road until the woman could be placed beyond danger.

Turn quick to the south! You will never see a grander spectacle than this. The Confederate command, divided into three divisions, with double lines dressed as if on parade, has received the order to advance. They had waited for Custer to charge, but the chevalier was also a strategist. His artillery, being better served, was creating the most havoc, and he could afford to delay. Look! Look! As the gray horsemen begin to move Custer's guns, which have been grouped in front of his center, lurch up and move at a gallop—four of them—two to the right and two to the left. In three minutes they are on his flanks and loaded with grape-shot and canister. The Confederate battery does not follow the example, and as the horsemen move forward the guns are useless.

"Trot! Gallop! Charge!" You hear the bugles sound the order, and you see 2,000 sabers flash in the sunset as 2,000 horsemen thunder over the plain. Give them credit for bravery even to recklessness. Before the horses are off a-trot the murderous grape-shot are knocking them down by dozens, and as the artilleryists change to canister 2,000 Federal carbines also open fire.

"Rally! Re-form! Forward!" Above the roar of cannon and musketry you can catch the notes of the bugles, and as the smoke lifts here and there in spots the eye can detect the gray horsemen seeking to obey the calls. They do rally. They do re-form. They do push forward under that terrible fire, but only to be broken up and swept aside. The Federal artilleryists get the order to cease firing, the crackle of musketry dies away, and five minutes later the smoke has drifted off, and the eye can scan the plain. Beaten, broken, slaughtered, and yet the gray horsemen are trying to rally again!

Now is the moment, and Custer has waited for it. Only the dead and wounded are left behind as he moves out, as his entire command sweeps straight across the plain and falls upon the broken and disorganized enemy. They rally here and there by the score and meet the shock. They fight singly and by twos and threes. Men wait and die rather than run away. Brave men, all of them—men whose deeds will be spoken of around our campfires for years to come. The only criticism will be that they did not have a leader equal to Custer in the murderous art of war.

Night has fallen, and the fight is over. There are prisoners to be guarded, wounded to be cared for, dead to be counted for the official report and spoils to be gathered up. The clouds have driven away to the east, and the canopy of heaven is studded with bright stars. There is no moon, and the blood spots on the snow gradually fade away and are lost to sight.

Hark! That sound is the cry of wounded men blended into one great wail for succor. It is freezing cold, and they are in torture. Hark again! That gruesome sound rising at intervals above the wailing comes from the wounded horses. They are also begging and pleading. Some are limping about among the dead and wounded men as if seeking their masters, pausing now and then to rub their cold noses against a body, while others are lying down and lift their heads only to utter a whiny which tells of fright and pain. Thank God that night and darkness come to the battlefield to hide its horrors! In the darkness we shall search out all the wounded, but we shall not be forced to look upon the mangled dead—mangled by shot and shell and grape and the iron hoofs of the charging horses until resemblance to humanity is lost and one cries out in horror.

CHAPTER XXX.

While the fight was raging the house and "quarters" were both in flames, fired by the shells from a Confederate gun. But for the strenuous efforts of the detachment guarding the prisoners in the barn that structure would have also been reduced to ashes. It therefore came about that when the battle was over and men began to bring in the wounded the barn was the only shelter to be had. The prisoners were turned out and the place given up to mourning, groaning men and those who sought to succor them. The sounds of battle had been heard in the Federal lines, and a brigade of infantry arrived about 8 o'clock in the evening. While their services were not needed, the half dozen surgeons sent out with the column had work to last them the long night through and far into the next day.

It is a grim sight, a field hospital like this, and they are grim men into whose hands the wounded fall as they are lifted off the stretchers, groaning, cursing or crying. The flight of a snowflake in a gale of wind is not more erratic than the flight of death missiles in a battle. Here are men wounded in the face; the next three or four may be wounded in the feet or ankles. Sabers have descended upon heads and shoulders; bullets have plowed their way into arms, sides, hips or legs; fragments of shell have

carried away fingers and reduced hands to pulp. Of a hundred men no two have received the same hurt.

Rode tables have been prepared, and strong men lift each victim up to be overhauled by the men who have stripped off coat and vest and rolled their sleeves far back. They look like butchers in a slaughter pen, but their hearts are tender toward these victims of battle, whether friend or foe. The bitterness of battle is at its height when the crash of artillery and the crackle of musketry are fiercest. When the battle is over, whether victorious or defeated, pity returns to the heart and blinds the eyes to the color of the uniform. Over each man lifted up there is a brief consultation.

Those bare armed men need waste no time. They can tell almost at a glance what the result will be. If it is a mortal hurt, the poor fellow is lifted aside to breathe his last as peacefully as possible under such surroundings. If there is hope for him, his wound is dressed with agile fingers, and he gives way to the next.

"That's Captain Wyle, my company captain!"

So exclaimed Steve Brayton as he entered the barn about 11 o'clock at night to see if he could recognize any Confederates being brought in. The captain had just been lifted to the table. He was conscious, but had not yet spoken. Those who brought him in said that he was pinned to the earth by the hind quarters of his dead horse, and that the animal was fearfully mangled by grape-shot.

"Shoulder dislocated, ribs broken, leg broken, struck in the groin by a carbine ball," announced the surgeon who made a rapid investigation.

"Any hope for me?" asked the captain, whose lips had been moistened with whisky, as it was observed that he desired to speak.

The surgeon shook his head and motioned to the attendants to lift the officer aside. When they had left him, Steve Brayton sat down beside him and bathed his face with whisky and gave him to drink. The captain had recognized him at once, but it was several minutes before he queried:

"You and Kenton were in the fight at Harrisonburg and were captured. How came you here?"

"We was made a bolt for it on the road and got away."

"And what has happened here?"

"Wah, Kenton was wounded, then me and him stood off Ike Baxter and his crowd, then the gal's mother died, then the gal and Kenton hev bin driv away to the Yankee lines. Sorry fur yo', cap, and sorry fur the rest of 'em, fur our hull crowd has bin wiped off the face of the earth!"

"Have we been defeated?"

"Regularly cleaned out, esp. I don't believe a hundred of our men get away. 'Cordin to what them doctors say, yo' can't pull through this. Do yo' want to leave any word with me?"

"No," whispered the captain after a moment's thought.

"Not even for the gal? She won't bear no grudge when she hears yo' a' dead."

The captain shook his head and closed his eyes. Steve moved away after a few minutes to look for other Confederates wounded, and two hours later the officer's dead body was carried out with others to make room for the wounded.

When morning came and the dead were gathered for burial, Steve Brayton found many that he could identify. Indeed a full half of his own company had been wiped out, and among them was Ike Baxter. But great as was the Confederate loss, that of the Federals was severe. History has said of that first real cavalry fight of the war that it was terribly brief in duration and appalling in its list of dead and wounded. It was almost night of the day following the fight before the last of the Federals moved off and left the field. And how changed was Rest Haven, and what a misnomer the title which had been given to it in the years of peace! Cinders and ashes showed where the houses had stood. Across the plain, furrowed by shot and shell and hoof, its snow white carpet now spattered and blotched by thousands blood stains, they had dug long trenches and covered in the dead. Trees had been cut down, bushes uprooted, and over acres of ground was strewn the wreck of battle.

I have but few more pages to write.

My story has not been all romance, and it is with a feeling of selfishness that I part from those of my characters who are with us in the flesh today, and whose hands I have held in mine within the last twelve months. At the opening of my story Winchester was described as a quaint old town. That was true of it—a quaint old town of quaint houses and streets and people. War wrecked it again and again. Every street and square and alley witnessed a death grapple. Every building which escaped the flames was marked by ball or bullet. A few months ago I looked in vain for trace of war. Here and there a quaint old house still stands, but the town is full of the bustle of these rushing days. Ah, but there was a trace of war after all. Up in the cemetery skirted by the Berryville pike I found grave after grave in which soldiers slept their last long sleep, each name engraved on the stone, and behind them the pitiful spot over which all may sorrow, but no one weep.

—The resting place of the "unknown." It was many days ere Kenton or Marian or Mrs. Baxter walked in the sunshine. In the case of the latter perhaps it was better that her mind groped in the darkness, and that it was months before she could realize her widowhood. General Custer kindly sent her on to Washington for treatment, and for weeks and weeks she kept calling out:

"He said he'd go fur help to capt' the Yankee, but he ain't dun come back yet. He's gon to be a great officer and hev a sword and a princin crister, and I'll hold up my head with any of 'em."

Where is Uncle Ben? Gone to his rest years ago, but he lived to see the end of the war and to enjoy for a season the haven of rest which kind hearts created for him.

There was a marriage in Winchester about two months after the battle of Rest Haven. They called it a military

marriage, because more than 50 Federal officers attended, because a Federal chaplain officiated, because a Federal band serenaded the happy couple. Who do you think gave away the bride? General Custer, who became a groom himself only a few days later. Royal Kenton had recovered from his wound, and the keen edge of Marian's grief had been somewhat dulled by lapse of time and the excitement of her surroundings. It was better so. Kenton was not held for exchange under the circumstances, nor did any one wish him to become a renegade by joining the Federal service. After the marriage the bridal couple, accompanied by Uncle Ben, went north and there remained till the close of the war. Steve Brayton was asked to go—nay, almost commanded—but he replied:

"See yere, Yank, I've bin thinkin and thinkin, and I make it out this way: I sorter owed the confederacy a grudge fur the way it treated yo', and hev'n paid it off and squared the debt I order go back. That won't be nuthin said about yo' arter the war, because yo' was actually driv out, but the boys would rub it in on me purty heavy to the day of my death. I'll jist surrender over again to this Yankee army, wait to be exchanged and in due time become a good Confed again."

And that was the course he followed, and when I shook hands with him in Winchester last spring I was proud to give him his title as lieutenant. Did the match please Uncle Ben? Hear what he says as he congratulates the bride:

"Now, Miss Sanshine, yo' all has dun gone a married Mars Kenton, an it does jist seem to me dat I ar' walkin round on a gal! He! But when I was

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